

'Thin' Missile Plan Hailed By Russell

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

Sen. Richard B. Russell (D-Ga.) yesterday hailed the Administration's reported approval of a "thin" ballistic missile defense, but only as a first step.

"It isn't adequate protection but it will give us a better idea of the costs," Russell told newsmen.

The chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee said he doubted that a "big system" of antiballistic missiles would cost "anything like the \$40 billion" that some have estimated.

Russell made his remarks in response to queries after a luncheon held in his honor by the local Georgia State Society at the Willard Hotel.

The Senator called the Administration's decision to move ahead with a missile defense setup, reported yesterday morning in The Washington Post, "the best news the American people have had in years."

The plan calls for a bargain basement start, with missile sites spread far enough apart to give the entire country some degree of protection, rather than clustering them only around key military bases and major cities.

Called Nike-X, it could be built in five years for \$3 billion, but beefed up from there by adding more missile sites.

Russell said he was satisfied with the proposal "only as a beginning."

Pentagon leaders maintain that \$10 billion will buy a healthy defense against the first-generation ICBM's China is expected to have as early as 1972.

Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara has said it could cost up to \$40 billion to protect against sophisticated Soviet ICBM's.

President Johnson's decision on a "thin" defense has yet to be formally announced, but Russell's brief remarks added confirmation that it has been made.

Members of both the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, and of the Joint Atomic Energy Committee have been pressing for construction of at least a limited anti-missile system.

Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said yesterday that the reported plan could touch off "very dangerous counter-measures by the Soviet Union."

Fulbright told United Press International that he was "very dubious of the plan" and proposed Congressional hearings on it. He said there appeared to be "great questions about its effectiveness."

Top Administration officials reportedly gave selected members of Congress a rundown on the plans Friday.

In a speech prepared for delivery in Jacksonville last night, Rep. Charles E. Bennett (D-Fla.), a leading member of the House Armed Services Committee said the Defense Department "appears to have finally broken the logjam . . . This is an apparent indication that our Nation is finally about to embark on the full development of an ABM system."